Imam Ghazali

The Value of Knowledge & Acquaintance

Booklet prepared for free distribution by

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Chapter One

THE VALUE OF KNOWLEDGE AND ACQUAINTANCE.

The basic need of anyone who desires salvation and a life of worship and devotion is to acquire knowledge and Acquaintance as this is the origin of everything on which depends all success. Knowledge and worship are so valuable and priceless gems that they form the subject-matter of all the compilations of the learned writers and of the speeches and sermons of the erudite religious scholars. The entire activities around us are devoted to the diffusion of the light of these most precious and essential divine gifts. To spread this light of knowledge and learning Exalted Allah revealed heavenly scriptures and sent down Prophets (AS). In fact, Allah created all things and all beings of the world and the heavens for the sake of knowledge and worship. The Qur'an says !

اَللّٰهُ الَّذِیْ خَلَقَ سَبْعَ سَمٰوٰتٍ وَّمِنَ الْاَرْضِ مِثْلَهُنَّ یَتَنَزَّلُ الْاَمْرُ بَیْنَهُنَّ لِتَعْلَمُوْٓا اَنَّ اللّٰهَ عَلٰی كُلِّ شَیْءٍ قَدِیْرٌ وَّاَنَّ اللّٰهَ قَدْ اَحَاطَ بِكُلِّ شَیْءٍ عِلْمًا .

(سورۃ الطلاق: ۱۲)

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The verse means :-

> It is Allah who has created the seven heavens and of the earth the like thereof. The commandment comes down among them slowly that you may know that Allah is Able to do all things and that Allah surrounds all things in knowledge. (65:12)

This verse is a clear proof of the excellence and importance of knowledge, particularly, the knowledge of religious tenets and of the oneness of Allah. At another place it has been said in the Holy Qur'an:

وَمَا خَلَقْتُ الْجِنَّ وَالْإِنْسَ إِلَّا لِيَعْبُدُونِ (سورة الذاريات : ٥٦)

> "I created the Jinn and mankind that they may worship only Me." (51:56)

There is a very clear description in this verse of the purpose of life. Thus, the most important work of the world consists of acquisition of knowledge and devotion to worship of Exalted Allah. This is also the aim of the creation of the two worlds. It is, therefore, very imperative that man should devote himself to these two duties sincerely and diligently in preference to all other activities which are vain and useless.

It should be noted that knowledge is superior to worship. The Holy Prophet (PBUH) has said in a Hadith : An 'Alim (a learned man) is superior to a worshipper, just as I am superior to you.

He (PBUH) also said : To call upon an 'Alim is better than a year's worship, night vigil and fasting. He (PBUH) also said : Should I tell you who are the best dwellers of Paradise? The noble companions (RAA) said : Yes, O Messenger of

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Allah! Do tell us that. He (PBUH) said the Ulama of my Ummah.

It appears from the foregoing Ahadith that in essence knowledge is better than worship. (It does not, however mean that worship is less important). In fact only that knowledge is useful which is put into practice and used in worship. Knowledge without action thereon is useless. Knowledge is like a tree and worship is like its fruit. A tree without fruit loses its importance.

Side by side with knowledge worship too is essential. It is. therefore, necessary for man to acquire excellence in both these branches.

Hazrat Hasan Basri (RA) has said:

> "Acquire knowledge without causing any loss to worship. Similarly, devote yourself to worship without causing any loss to the acquisition of knowledge.

Thus it becomes confirmed that knowledge and worship both are important in their places for practice and action. Knowledge should, however, be accorded a preference. because it is the guiding factor. That is why, the Holy Prophet (PBUH) has said : Knowledge is the guiding factor of action and action is subordinate to knowledge. (In other words knowledge is indispensable for action; no action can be taken without knowledge.) There are two reasons for according preference to knowledge.

For worship to be in order and rightly offered it is very necessary that the worshipper should have adequate knowledge about his Lord whom he is worshipping concerning His entity and attributes, both personal and

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qualitative, essential and impossible. This is necessary, lest he should, in his ignorance, ascribe to Allah some unrealistic and derogatory attribute to Exalted Allah and thus ruin his worship altogether.

This is a grievous risk which I have discussed in detail in my book, Ihya-ul-Uloomiddeen under the heading "Bad End" in the chapter on "Fear" (كتاب الخوف).

Thereafter, man should acquire knowledge about essential duties (commands) and then knowledge about the prohibitions as laid down in the Sharee'ah. Then these commands must be obeyed and the prohibitions shunned totally. It is not possible to worship Allah in the right way and refrain from sins, unless a man learns the method, style the prescribed hours and the manner of praying.

It is necessary in connection with the Shara'ee forms of worship to know the essential duties, like purity of the body Prayer (Salat), fasting and Zakat (compulsory charity) including their various problems, injunctions and conditions etc. In order to perform these various forms and items of worship correctly. It is not only likely but quite certain that on account of ignorance a man may be doing during his worship something which may violate his prayer ablution or he may fail to do these acts according to the Sunnah.

It is, therefore very important to know the problems and injunctions not only about their outer form but also about their inner spirit. This is an essential duty. Thus توكل (Trust in Allah),

تفويض (Entrusting all matters to Allah), رضا (Contentment with Allah's Decrees), صبر (Patience), توبة (Repentance) إخلاص (Sincerity) etc. Are forms of worship of the

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heart which will - God willing be explained in the ensuing chapters.

In the same way it is necessary to acquire knowledge about the prohibitions which are the opposites of the commandments. These are: سخط (Anger), طول امل (Prolonged hopes), رياء (Ostentation), كبر (Pride), عجب و حسد (Vanity and Jealousy), etc. It is necessary to refrain from these inner vices because inner worship is also an obligatory duty, about which Glorious Allah has issued clear injunctions, For example :

وَعَلَى اللهِ فَتَوَكَّلُوْا اِنْ كُنْتُمْ مُّؤْمِنِيْنَ . (سورة المائدة : ٢٣)

So put your trust in Allah if you are believers. (5:23)

وَاشْكُرُوْا لِلّٰهِ اِنْ كُنْتُمْ اِيَّاهُ تَعْبُدُوْنَ . (سورة البقرة : ٢٣)

.... and render thanks to Allah if you worship only Him. (2:23)

وَاصْبِرْ وَمَا صَبْرُكَ اِلَّا بِاللهِ (سورة النحل : ١٢٧)

Endure patiently (O Muhammad); your endurance is only by (the help of) Allah. (16:127)

وَاصْبِرُوْا اِنَّ اللهَ مَعَ الصّٰبِرِيْنَ . (سورة الانفال : ٣٦)

Endure patiently, for Allah is with those who are patient- (8:46)

وَتَبَتَّلْ اِلَيْهِ تَبْتِيْلًا (سورة المزمل : ٨)

And devote to Him with complete devotion. (73:8)

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Now see that in these verses Exalted Allah has enjoined sincerity in all actions and deeds. There are other verses containing similar injunctions like those about prayers fasting, etc. It is surprising that the people take care to discharge their obligations to prayers and fasting but pay no attention to the obligation mentioned above, although both these categories are equal in their obligatory nature and the Holy Qur'an contains injunctions about both.

What will be the fate of that person who is so much drowned in his worldly affairs that he makes no distinction between what is good and what is bad. Leaving aside the good deeds which Exalted Allah has described in the Holy Qur'an as wisdom and light of right guidance, he acquires such knowledge whereby he earns unlawful wealth and wretched worldly gains.

O you who are hankering after the world! Have you no fear of Allah in your heart that ignoring many of the essential duties (واجبات), you are devoting yourself to optional prayers and fasting? This behaviour on your part speaks of your worthlessness. It is also likely that you may, in your ignorance or negligence be committing such major sins as, may render you liable for punishment. This being your behaviour, if you give up some of the permissible deeds like eating drinking, sleeping, etc. For the sake of attaining nearness to Allah your labour will go waste. What is worse and more risky is that you build hopes on these acts, although it is sin to entertain hopes and expectations. You are under the misconception that yours is a good intention. There is a difference between a good intention and wishfulness of which you are not aware.

Again, you may be expressing to Exalted Allah your anxiety, anguish and unwillingly fear, impatience and displeasure, and be thinking that in this way you are only expressing your submission and supplication to Allah. You are

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addicted to ostentation and show, yet consider it lawful; you may invite the people to piety and righteousness, Yet you take your sins as acts of virtue on account of this invitation, and thereby you may hope for reward instead of punishment. This is all Satan's deception and you are labouring under a misconception and grave negligence. All these ills and evils befall him who does something without acquiring the requisite knowledge which is most imperative.

It should also be borne in mind that the outer actions and inner actions are closely interrelated, with the result that deterioration in one affects the other. For example, ostentation or show being an inner action is not visible to others, but it has the effect of spoiling worship and rendering it unacceptable in the sight of Exalted Allah. Similarly, اخلاص (sincerity) is an inner action but its presence or absence renders the outer actions acceptable or unacceptable.

A man's outer actions cannot be sound, unless be knows the effects of the inner actions on the outer ones and knows how and from which of the inner actions he should keep himself aloof. Thus, for want of this knowledge neither his inner nor his outer actions can be sound and acceptable. His endeavors without knowledge will result in nothing but mere toil and trouble. Thus it has been said in the Holy Qur'an :

خَسِرَ الدُّنْيَا وَالْاٰخِرَةَ ؕ ذٰلِكَ هُوَ الْخُسْرَانُ الْمُبِيْنُ (سورة الحج: ١١)

He loses both the world and the Hereafter; that is indeed an evident loss. (22:11)

The Holy Prophet (PBUH) has also said:

It is the fortunate and pious who are granted learning and the unfortunate are deprived of it.

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This Hadith means that a man without knowledge is unfortunate in every respect. It is his bad luck that he is without knowledge. For this reason all his worship and devotion go waste and they are rendered unacceptable.

نعوذ با لله من فتنة الجهل ومن علم لا ينفع ومن عمل لا يرفع

I seek refuge with Allah from the trial of ignorance, from knowledge that is not profitable and from a deed that is not lifted above (i.e. it remains unaccepted).

That is why, all the saints of the Ummah and the friends of Allah first tried to acquire knowledge. The soundness of worship mostly depends on knowledge. Discerning men, scholars and qualified persons consider knowledge to be the foundation of all good deeds and virtues.

The entire discussions boils to the conclusion that without knowledge worship remains defective and incomplete. It is, therefore, necessary to accord preference to knowledge to worship. Another reason to accord preference to knowledge is that beneficial knowledge creates fear of Allah, the Lord of the two worlds, Exalted Allah has said :

إِنَّمَا يَخْشَى اللهَ مِنْ عِبَادِهِ الْعُلَمَاءُ .

It is the learned ones among His servants who fear Allah. (35:28).

A man who has not acquired adequate knowledge of and acquaintance with Allah, cannot do full justice to His worship, nor to His fear, nor to His respect and regard. That is why knowledge combines in it all virtues and qualities. It accumulates in one person all virtues and stops him from all vices. He becomes entitled to Allah's help and support. These

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are the only two gifts which a servant of Allah needs in the path of worship. It is knowledge which is the first requirement of a man in following the path of worship.

SECTION 1

To Acquire Knowledge Is An Obligatory Duty

THE LIMITS OF KNOWLEDGE

There is a Hadith of the Holy Prophet (PBUH):

طلبُ العلم فريضةٌ على كُلّ مسلمٍ ومُسلمة

It is an obligatory duty of every Muslim man and woman to seek knowledge.

A question arises as to which kind of knowledge does the Hadith refer and what are its limits?

The answer to this question is that it refers to the seeking of three kinds of knowledge:-

1. The knowledge of Tauheed (the oneness of Allah), i.e., knowledge of tenets.

2. Knowledge of secrets, i.e. the knowledge of practicing the Sharee'ah and to Tasaw-wuf (Mysticism) which concerns the heart and its spiritual diseases.

3. The knowledge of the Sharee'ah i.e. . Islamic Jurisprudence and its principles.

As regards the limits of knowledge these are: Knowledge of the Oneness of Allah and Tenets form an obligatory duty to the extent that a man should learn correctly

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that he has to worship Allah, the one who has no partner, is adorned with all attributes, is Free from "Newness" He has no beginning and no end. He is eternal and Everlasting. Muhammad (PBUH) is His servant and Messenger whatever he (PBUH) conveyed with his blessed tongue to his Ummah from his Lord (Allah) is cent per cent true. This includes, revelations and details about the events of the Hereafter. It is necessary to understand and know that tenets of the school of the Ahle-e-Sunnat wal Jama'at so that man may remain safe from matters contrary to the Sharee'ah, innovations and forbidden acts. Do not invent in Deen anything new, nor try to prove as correct what is not proved from the Qur'an and the Ahadith. This is a very dangerous matter. As regards Tawheed (Oneness of Allah), its proofs are available in the Book of Allah, i.e. The Holy Qur'an. Our learned scholars have explained them in detail in the books of Principles of Deen. In short, it is an obligatory duty to learn everything the ignorance of which may lead man to ruin, error and deviation from the straight path. It is not lawful to be ignorant of such important matters.

It is necessary to acquire such knowledge of the secrets i.e. The knowledge of "Sulook and Tasaw-wuf" as may acquaint man with the commands and prohibitions and he may become aware of Allah's greatness and glory, and the sincerity of intention and be able to preserve and protect this knowledge (In order to become secure from the vices and sins which ruins virtues and good deeds). Details of most of these will follow shortly. The limits of the knowledge concerning the Sharee'ah and Fiqh (Jurisprudence) it is that man should acquire the knowledge of all the obligatory duties. It is necessary to know these duties and the method of their discharging in full detail, e.g. purification of the body, Prayer, fasting. It is also necessary to have a knowledge of Zakat and Hajj for those on whom these obligations fall due, so that they may discharge these obligations. It is not obligatory, although it is desirable, for

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those who are not liable for these two obligations to have a knowledge thereof. These are the minimum limits of knowledge which must be acquired as a matter of obligation, as there is no escape from this. As regards the question of acquiring this knowledge in greater details, so as to be able to debate with non-Muslims and convince them of the truth of Islam with convincing arguments and proofs, it is فرض كفايه (an obligation which can be discharged by a section of the population of an area on behalf of the entire population. If none discharges this duty the entire population becomes liable for it.) The obligation on you is limited to the extent that your beliefs and tenets become quite right and in order. You are not liable for more than this.

As regards the knowledge of Tawheed, it is not necessary to know all its branches, details and problems relating to it. Its knowledge is necessary only to an extent which may enable you to correct your doubts and remove your misunderstandings if you ever face them. It is not necessary that you should involve yourself in debates and arguments an this topic, because it is likely to throw you into doubts and confusion. It must also be understood that in every area and city there should be a learned scholar to resolve such doubts refute بدعات (innovations). He should remain busy with acquiring detailed knowledge about these matters. In the presence of such a scholar the responsibility is lifted from the rest of the population.

It is also not necessary to have a detailed knowledge of the 'secrets', except that one must know those vices and evils which spoil worship, so that one may remain safe from them. It is also necessary to have a knowledge of the good actions of the hearts, e.g., praise of Allah, gratitude, trust in Allah, etc. But for this, a detailed knowledge is not necessary. Likewise, it is not essential to have a detailed knowledge of all the chapters of Islamic Jurisprudence (Fiqh), viz., Nikah (marriage),

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divorce, sale, monopoly, etc. This is فرض کفایہ (a collective and not an individual duty, as has already been explained)

One may ask if it is possible to acquire such knowledge of Tawheed without a teacher forms as an obligatory duty of every individual.

The answer to this question is that a teacher solves difficulties and makes learning easier and quicker. Allah grants the honour of being a teacher whom He wills. It should be borne in mind that the valley of knowledge is very difficult to cross. Many people take its path then give up their journey and some go astray from that path. Some fortunate persons cross this valley quickly and successfully, but some remain wandering this way and that way in utter confusion. In fact everything rests in the hands of Allah.

I have already mentioned that the virtue of service to and worship of Allah solely depends on the requisite knowledge, particularly the knowledge of Tawheed and Tasaw-wuf and there is no escape from it.

It occurs in a narrative that Exalted Allah commanded Hazrat Daood (AS) to acquire useful knowledge . He (AS) inquired as to what kind of knowledge was useful. Allah told him (AS) : Usual knowledge is that which helps to recognize My greatness and grandeur and to believe that I have power over all things. This knowledge shall bring you closer to Me.

Hazrat Ali (RAA) is reported to have said:

If I had died in my childhood and entered Paradise, I would not have been as happy as I would have been happy on knowing my Lord on growing up. This is because the man who is favoured with a knowledge of Allah will fear Him most and will worship him most sincerely and heartily. Knowledge

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should be acquired with sincerity of intention and right understanding and not only with the help of traditions and narrations. (It is difficult to put into practice knowledge that is acquired without understanding it.)

That knowledge becomes a source of loss instead of gain which is acquired with the intention of overpowering men, associating and mixing with the rich, taking pride in defeating opponents in argumentation or for attaining worldly gains.

Hazrat Bayazid (RA) once said:

I devoted myself and my soul to the acquisition of knowledge for about thirty years but I did not find anything more risky for me than knowledge. (Satan tries to create pride in the hearts of the learned on account of their learning by which they are generally beguiled.) You should, however, not allow Satan to deceive you when knowledge is so dangerous, it should be avoided and abandoned. This mode of thinking is wrong and misleading .

The Holy Prophet (PBUH) has said :

> When on the night of Ascension معراج I peeped into Hell I saw that most of its inmates were the poor people. The noble companions (RAA) asked: O Messenger of Allah! Were they those who had no money? The Holy Prophet said: so, they were devoid of knowledge and learning. (Knowledge is the root of all injunctions and commandments).

A man without knowledge is ignorant of the injunctions about worship. He cannot worship Allah according to the prescribed etiquette and conditions. As such, an ignorant

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man is in loss, even if he devotes himself to worship like all the Angels of the heavens. So O worshipper, put all your thought and attention in the acquisition of knowledge and avoid idleness and confusion. Beware that error and straying are the worst dangers confronting you.

When you reflect on the attributes and creation of Almighty Allah you will become convinced that you have only One Allah Worthy of worship who has absolute power over all things with an exclusive will He is All-Knowing and All-Seeing. His speech, knowledge and will are not "new", He is immune from all kinds of losses and calamities. He is also Free from the attributes of all that is created. He is neither like a created being, nor is there anyone like Him. He is also free from place and directions; no accident or distress can approach Him.

When a man reflects on the miracles and the tokens of Prophethood of the Messenger of Allah (PBUH) he shall become convinced that he (PBUH) is the true Messenger of Allah and the trustee of His revelations.

If you examine the beliefs of the past saints and the dignitaries of the Ummah, you will find that they had a belief in the vision of Glorious Allah (in the Hereafter), that He is Living, He has no limit and no direction, that the Holy Qur'an is Allah's uncreated word; it is neither letters nor has its voice. If it were in letters or voice, it would become something created. It is, therefore Free from letters and voice because these are attributes of what is new and not of what is Eternal and Everlasting.

Whatever happens in the universe happens with the command, will and power of Allah. All virtues and vices, gains and losses, belief and disbelief are subordinate to Allah's will and wish nothing concerning the creatures is binding on

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Him. If He rewards anyone, it is His mercy and if He punishes anyone it is His justice.

Whatever the custodian of the Sharee'ah, i.e. The Holy Prophet (PBUH) said with his sacred tongue is true without any doubt. These include : Affairs of the Hereafter and the Partition (برزخ), Resurrection, punishment of the grave, the interrogation (in the grave) by the two Angels, Munkir and Nakir, the scale Justice, etc. These are all true and they form principles of Deen. All the past and present saints of the Ummah have been professing and acting upon these beliefs. They have always refrained from innovation and new things in Deen. We too therefore, seek refuge with Exalted Allah from these innovations and desires and lusts.

After having learnt the various beliefs and tenets, man should acquire knowledge about of the heart, e.g. Sincerity, show, pride, etc. Thereafter, knowledge should be acquired about the necessary outer acts, e.g. Purity, prayers, fasting, Zakat, Hajj, etc. When you have acquired knowledge to this extent according to the details mentioned, you have completed the knowledge of the obligatory duties pertaining to every individual and have become aware of the problems and injunctions of the Sharee'ah, Now you may be counted among the Ulama of the Ummah of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), on the condition that you act according to the knowledge you have acquired and are anxious about the safety of your final fate (in the Hereafter).

After having completed a servant of Allah in true sense, working with knowledge sense and understanding, you are no longer ignorant, a mere follower of others nor negligent. You have by the grace of Allah, crossed the valley of knowledge and acquaintance and have paid its full due.

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May Exalted Allah help us all, by His grace, to act upon these injunctions with ease and facility.

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